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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 13, 2000

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**OPENING STATEMENT**

**REP. JAMES SAXTON**

**SPECIAL OVERSIGHT PANEL ON TERRORISM**

This morning, the Special Oversight Panel on Terrorism meets in open session to receive testimony and discuss the present and future course of terrorism in the Middle East. This open hearing follows a closed briefing we received on Tuesday from the Intelligence Community exploring the same topic. It has been the Terrorism Panel's practice, in the interests of objectivity and gathering all the facts, to pair classified briefings and open hearings on the same topic in the same week. That way we garner the best that the classified world of intelligence has to offer and the best from independent scholars working in universities, think tanks, and other institutions. Comparing and contrasting the views of the Intelligence Community and independent scholars, learning areas of agreement and disagreement, is I think an excellent way of educating ourselves.

The functional and regional approach the Terrorism Panel is taking in these hearings to study terrorism is also working well, I believe. It enables us to focus and explore in depth the subject matter. So far, we have had terrorism hearings on weapons of mass destruction and Latin America. Our plan is to continue having hearings on a region-by-region basis. For example, future hearings will look at terrorism in South Asia and Central Asia. Eventually, Terrorism Panel hearings will have examined terrorist movements around the entire globe. Our objective is to understand both the unique particulars of terrorism in each region, as well as overall commonalities and trends in global terrorism that may be useful in helping us assess the threat in the future.

So far, the Terrorism Panel has managed to sustain a very ambitious schedule of classified Intelligence Community briefings and open hearings. Since our first hearing in late-May, we have done in weeks what a subcommittee or panel would normally require months to accomplish. Six full panel events in a little over one month is a lot of ground covered in a relatively short time. Let us hope that we can sustain this momentum.

Today, we turn our attention to terrorism in the Middle East. To many scholars, and certainly in the popular imagination, the Middle East is the central locus of modern terrorism. There are some good reasons for so thinking. Five of the seven nations listed by the Department of State as sponsors of terrorism are located in the Middle East. Most of the U.S. casualties suffered from terrorist attacks have been inflicted by

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terror groups operating in the Middle East. Certainly, Middle Eastern terrorist groups seem better than terrorists in other regions at getting themselves into international newspaper headlines. For example, just recently, on July 5, terrorists tried hijacking an airliner in Jordan and terrorist threats led the U.S. State Department to cancel 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations in Amman.

Middle Eastern terrorism also appears to be on the leading edge of the terrorist phenomenon. New trends in terrorism often seem to originate in the Middle East. International terrorism, for example, appears to have evolved from Middle Eastern terrorist groups who began focused on a local or regional problem, but who expanded their goals and operations to the world stage. Hizballah, for example, is based in the Middle East, but has carried out serious attacks in South America. As a further example, the relatively new terrorist group—Al Qaida, headed by Usama Bin Ladin—may foreshadow a new trend toward relatively self-sufficient terrorist organizations that sustain themselves and operate independently of a state sponsor. Finally, given the ongoing proliferation of missiles and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, I think it would surprise no one if the world's first terrorists armed with a nuclear missile appeared there.

But there are also benign trends in the Middle East that could mitigate or even profoundly alter the future terrorist threat. There are some signs that Middle Eastern governments are becoming less sympathetic and less tolerant of terrorism. Just recently, on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Speaker of the Egyptian Parliament called for greater cooperation among Muslim nations in the fight against terrorism. Reformist movements in Iran, and Israel's attempt to find a political solution to the problem of the Palestinians, could conceivably deprive key terrorist groups of the chief rationalizations for their existence. Even Libya, which in times past behaved as if its sponsorship of terrorism was a badge of honor, has been attempting to distance itself from terrorism.

We have with us today a distinguished panel of independent experts to address terrorism in the Middle East:

- Dr. Ariel Merari from Harvard University is a leading scholar on the phenomenon of terrorist suicide attacks and the deterrence of terrorism in the Middle East context;
- Dr. Amos Perlmutter of American University has written and lectured extensively on security issues of the Middle East and on the role of terrorism;
- Ms. Juliette Kayyem from Harvard University served on the National Commission on Terrorism and, in addition to other issues, I understand she will offer some important cautionary advice, that we all should heed, about avoiding stereotyping, about being careful not to confuse terrorists with Arabs or Islam, a point I have often made myself.

So it is a well-balanced panel before us, having broad but complementary expertise, prepared to discuss the psychology, the political and strategic goals and methods, and the particulars of specific terrorist movements. I thank you all for being here, and welcome. But before proceeding to your testimony, I want to call upon Mr. Snyder, the Ranking Democrat on the Terrorism Panel, for any statement he may wish to make.

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